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Upper Arlington Golden Bear Ice Hockey team prepares for the new season

by Sarah Oberlin

While many in central Ohio enjoyed the last few weeks of summer vacation, the relentless Upper Arlington Golden Bear ice hockey team traded the rink for the turf. Instead of sticks and pucks, the team has picked up weights. They have shed their skates and laced up their running shoes. All this is part of the plan to maintain the high level of excellence they've been accustomed to the last few years according to Head Coach Jay Graham. "We want our athletes coming into the season in the best possible shape so that we don't lose valuable teaching time trying to condition athletes."

To accomplish their goals, many of the Bears spend their summer on the ice, in the weight room, and participating in a rigorous off-ice conditioning program with Anthony Donskov, a former pro hockey player and certified strength and conditioning professional. According to Donskov, "off-season conditioning enhances relative strength (pound for pound), speed and power which are all of extreme importance for the competitive hockey player. Our program promotes injury prevention and performance enhancement so the player may stay healthy and well throughout the rigors of the hockey season." Coach Graham agrees, "Our season is so demanding that it's vital for the safety of our athletes to be conditioned. This conditioning regimen has resulted in a significant decline in the amount of injuries related to fatigue and strength. In many cases, we were simply in better shape for the playoff grind than our opponents. That's why we work so hard in preseason."

The high rate of participation in this optional pre-season conditioning is a testament to the commitment and determination of the athletes. Nearly 75% of the prospective team members can be found training at 6:00 am, before school starts and the sun rises. In addition, they hit the weight room 3 times a week. During summer vacation, players took to the ice several times to "keep the rust of the blades" and "work on their pace of play, aggression, and stamina," says Graham. "We have a saying on our team, either we're coming out of the corner with the puck, or no one is!"

With the graduation of several key players and on the heels of their second trip to the Frozen Four (state tournament), the Bears have their work cut out for them. "Our biggest challenge for the upcoming season is to try to fill the shoes of some of the best players to ever play in the CHC", says Graham. "It won't be easy, but if our players work hard, execute the game plan, and learn from mistakes, we will be a successful team. Defensively, we will be sound, but our largest challenge will be for someone to emerge as a consistent goal scorer. If we can make that happen, we have no limit to what we can achieve."

Andrew Daehn and James Baugh work on balance.

The Golden Bear season doesn't officially start until November, but in Upper Arlington they never thought it ended.

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As dawn breaks, the workout ends with 100 yard team sprints.



Freshman goalie Eric Spencley strengthens upper body

